

**“NEGLECTED RESPONSIBILITIES: THE US RESPONSE TO THE
IRAQI REFUGEE CRISIS”**

***JOINT BRIEFING BY THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEES
ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA AND INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND OVERSIGHT***

OPENING STATEMENT BY CHAIRMAN BILL DELAHUNT

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*** *REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY * ***

Let me likewise thank you, Chairman Ackerman, and Ranking Member Pence, for arranging this joint briefing.

Former Secretary of State Colin Powell was right when he told President Bush prior to the invasion of Iraq that “You are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people. You will own all of their hopes, aspirations, and problems. You’ll own it all.” He called this the “Pottery Barn rule” – you break it, you own it.

Well, we own a desperate humanitarian crisis with profound consequences if not urgently addressed.

There are more than 4.5 million Iraqis who are today either refugees outside of Iraq or so-called IDP’s – internally displaced persons – primarily as a result of the sectarian cleansing that has occurred in Iraq over the past five years. I would submit that this sad reality imposes a moral responsibility on this Administration and this Congress – for we cannot deny that the

proximate cause of this human tragedy is the invasion of Iraq and its aftermath.

Our response must therefore be timely, decisive, and fully-resourced – not simply because it is right and reflects our values. But because it will prevent the further erosion of how we are viewed in the region.

We should be reminded of testimony at earlier hearings as to the declining opinion of the United States. Nowhere has America's image and reputation fallen farther than in the Muslim world.

In five key Middle Eastern countries – Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, and Lebanon – negative ratings of the United States rose to 82 percent by 2006.

And it gets worse. On average, only seven percent of Middle Eastern Arabs believe that attacks on civilians are ever justified; but a majority (53 percent) approve of attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq.

And 65 percent of people in Turkey, a long-standing U.S. ally, fear that the United States might attack it in a dispute. Majorities agree with that belief in Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait. Kuwait! A country the United States liberated from Saddam Hussein in 1991.

So – put aside our values – it is in our self-interest to prioritize this issue and act accordingly because, as the State Department's own Advisory Group on

Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World has found, “hostility toward the U.S. makes achieving our policy goals far more difficult.”

There should be a realization that we do not want to repeat what occurred in Afghanistan – When after the Soviets were defeated we ignored that country, as we later learned, much to our peril. We cannot afford to allow a breeding ground for terrorism to fester in the Middle East that will haunt us for generations to come.

I would also point out that working through the United Nations and U.N.-affiliated organizations will further state to the world that we are dedicated to working in a cooperative fashion with other nations. And that multilateralism is a significant facet of our foreign policy.

And let’s be clear – it’s going to cost money. Estimates vary between \$1.5 and \$2 billion. But we should remind ourselves that that figure is less than one week’s worth of war in Iraq, and represents a significant investment in our national security.

By my estimates, about \$106.3 million has been given to various UN appeals for Iraqi refugees. Unfortunately, that amount is woefully deficient. The UNHCR, in our briefing last week, announced that they would need \$498.5 million just to meet the needs of the most desperate refugees this year. That means there is an immediate shortfall of \$392.3 million. That’s a little more than one day’s worth of military expenditure in Iraq.

And where is the Iraqi government on this issue? They have agreed to contribute 25 million to the crisis. At the same time reports indicate that increased Iraqi oil revenues stemming from high prices and improved security are piling up in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York rather than being spent on needed reconstruction projects.

Out of \$10 billion budgeted for capital projects in 2007, only 4.4 percent had been spent by August, according to official Iraqi figures reported in January by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO).

A quarterly report released by Stuart W. Bowen Jr., the U.S. special inspector general for Iraqi reconstruction, says rising production and high prices could produce a revenue windfall for Iraq this year, according to the Associated Press.

Capital projects expenditure this year is expected to reach only \$4.3 billion, less than half of the \$10 billion spent in 2007, according to a GAO analysis of Iraqi government data provided by the U.S. Treasury.

This is simply unacceptable. And it is up to the Iraqi government to take responsibility for addressing this situation.